

**Tennessee Town NIA General Membership Meeting**  
**6:30 p.m., Monday; July 10, 2023; Buchanan Center, 1195 SW Buchanan**

*The wearing of facial masks and social distancing are optional for this meeting.*

TENTATIVE AGENDA:

- I. Welcome, Distribution of Free Smoke Detectors and Batteries
- II. Adoption of Agenda (vote)
- III. Approval of May 8, 2023, General Membership Meeting Minutes (pgs. 2-6 of meeting packet; vote)
- IV. Acceptance of Treasurer's Reports (pg. 7; vote)
- V. Community Policing Report: TPD Ofc. Devon Long (10 minutes)
- VI. Property Maintenance Report: Shane Hoven (10 minutes)
- VII. City Council Report: Karen Hiller (10 minutes)
- VIII. Citizen Advisory Council Report: Don Fortin (10 minutes).
- IX. Fall 2023 Neighborhood Cleanup in October 2023 (vote)
- X. President Bell's "Bottom-Up" Planning Proposal (as seen in the Topeka Capital-Journal, pgs. 12-14; vote)
- XI. Fighting the Onslaught Of Dollar Stores (FOODS) Efforts to Change the Vote for a Dollar Tree at 1404 SW 17th, City Support for Grocery Store Retention/Development (pgs. 14-15; vote)
- XII. "Paint Day" at 1208 SW Munson: Vice President Pat DeLapp (vote)
- XIII. DREAMS 3 Application: King's Court Complex Improvements Update (pgs. 8-9)
- XIV. Old Business:
  - A. Private-Public Partnership with Stormont Vail, the City of Topeka and GraceMed Update (pgs. 9-11)
  - B. Lane Garden Update (pg. 11)
  - C. Central Topeka Grocery Store Update (pgs. 10-11)
  - D. Topeka Poverty Simulation Update (pg. 12)
  - E. 2023 Brown v. Board, Juneteenth Celebration Events Report
  - F. Pedestrian Mid-Block Lighting Update (pg. 12)
  - G. International Academy Update, Food Giveaway: Sandy Lassiter
- XV. New Business: None
- XVI. Kudos:
  - A. Happy 247th Birthday, America! What Does America Mean to You?
  - B. Kudos from Attendees
- XVII. Announcements:
  - A. Community Engagement Programs: (1) *Emergency Program*: Intended to help homeowners make repairs to immediate health or safety hazards, (2) *Accessibility Program*: Provides modifications to residential homes for owners or tenants with disabilities, (3) *Property Maintenance Repair Program*: Assists with repairs for low-income homeowners who need repairs to bring their homes up to code and make the home safe, livable, and healthy. All eligible households must have an active property maintenance violation and be on the deed of the property. For more info. or to apply, please call Housing Services at 785-368-3711.
  - B. Computers for Seniors, Lawn Moving Services: Contact Community Engagement at 785-368-0166 (Maria Anderson) or 785-368-3663 (Bianca Burnett).
  - C. TOTO first-time homebuyers' assistance program: The program helps low-income families purchase their first home through HUD funding. The program helps Topeka residents become homeowners by providing education, financing, and home rehabilitation by partnering with Housing and Credit Counseling Inc. For more info., please call 785-234-0217, ext. 317.
  - D. 17th Annual Tennessee Town Basketball Tournament (235-1834), National Night Out Against Crime, 9 a.m., Sat., Aug. 5, 2023, King's Court Complex, SW Lincoln and Munson Sts.
  - E. Next Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Mon., September 11, 2023, Buchanan Ctr., 1195 SW Buchanan
- XVIII. Adjournment

Tennessee Town NIA General Membership Meeting  
6:30 p.m., Monday, July 10, 2023  
Buchanan Center Conference Room, 1195 SW Buchanan

Minutes of May 8, 2023 General Membership Meeting

Attendees: President Michael Bell, Vice President Pat DeLapp, Secretary-Treasurer Sandra Lassiter, Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) Rep. Donald Fortin, Topeka City Council Member Karen Hiller, Topeka Police Ofc. Devon Long, Property Maintenance Officer Shane Hoven, Ann Striecher, Antwone McAfee, Bob Cockerham, and Zachary Scott.

President Bell called the meeting to order at 6:41 p.m.

City Council Report: Karen Hiller gave the report. She said the “Changing the Culture of Property Maintenance” initiative was entering its 2nd summer of operation and that volunteers and clients were being sought for mowing and other activities. Hiller said the mowing side would have kids working, earning and learning. She said a rewrite of the vegetation guidelines was ongoing regarding vines, shrubs and trees. Hiller congratulated Tennessee Town for looking good last year and encouraged residents to take pictures of how well yards were being maintained and post them at the city’s website and at other places online. She said the local media has been supportive of Change the Culture’s efforts.

Hiller spoke on Omnicircle, a black male mentoring program that now includes women and how it had done positive work in the Central Park NIA.

Regarding the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Hiller said it had been vested at \$1 million so far, with the City providing \$750,000 of those funds. President Michael Bell asked about leveraging efforts to grow the Fund’s account. Hiller said she was unaware of any such efforts.

Adoption of Agenda:

*Donald Fortin moved approval of the May 8, 2023, NIA meeting agenda as presented. Zachary Scott seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

Approval of Jan. 9 and March 13, 2023, General Membership Meeting Minutes:

*Pat DeLapp moved approval of the Jan. 9, 2023, NIA general membership meeting minutes as presented. Fortin seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

*Pat DeLapp moved approval of the Mar. 13, 2023, NIA general membership meeting minutes as presented. Fortin seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

Acceptance of Treasurer’s Reports:

Once again, Bell said that community engagement had been unable to provide figures for the meeting notice card copying and mailing expenses, so there would be no NIA support budget report to review.

Regarding the Envista Free-Will donation account, Bell said that DeLapp had deposited \$20 into the account since the March 13 NIA meeting to keep the account open. The new balance will be provided at the July 10, 2023, NIA meeting. No withdrawals ever have been made on this account.

Community Policing Report: TPD Ofc. Devon Long: Ofc Long said abandoned vehicles had been the challenge in Tennessee Town since the last report. He said that the report was pretty clean otherwise.

Property Maintenance Report: Shane Hoven: Hoven spoke on “weed flags,” neon green flags placed where noxious weeds are present. He said property maintenance first conducts a courtesy visit followed by a citation with no warning. He said it took 17-20 days to complete the typical weed case.

2023 Juneteenth Celebration Event, 2023 Brown v. Board Event Update: Regarding the Juneteenth event, Bell said Black History Museum Curator Christine Smith would facilitate.

After initially looking at 3:30 p.m. on Sat., June 10, 2023, for the event time and date, now the NIA is looking at Mon., June 19, 2023, at a time yet to be determined, to work with other groups holding Juneteenth activities that day. The NIA's theme for its Juneteenth event is "What Does the Official End of Slavery Mean in 2023?"

Two speakers, Courtland Davis (<https://www.facebook.com/courtland.davis.39>) and ShaMecha King Simms (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100087980467244>) have been identified. The NIA has a 3rd speaker in mind and is communicating with him. Faith Temple's Christine Smith has agreed to facilitate the event, which is set to be held in front of the Black History Museum at 1149 SW Lincoln (formerly the Colored Women's Club-house).

*Sandy Lassiter moved that the NIA's Executive Committee work with Christine Smith, as well as other individuals and entities, to bring about the Juneteenth recognition event at the Black History Museum, 1149 SW Lincoln. Bell seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

Regarding the Brown event, Bell said it would be held at noon on Sat., May 13, 2023, in front of the Buchanan Center, 1195 SW Buchanan. He said that historian and Tennessee Town resident Donna Rae Pearson would facilitate the event. The Brown Foundation had identified 2 speakers for the event: Dr. John Edgar Tidwell and Victoria Lawton Benson.

DREAMS 3 Application: King's Court Complex Improvements Update: Per the identified 2023 NIA goals, Bell said there would be a workshop from 6-8:30 p.m. on Wed., May 17, 2023, on applying for the DREAMS 3 funds for the improvements. He said he had reserved 4 spots for the NIA, 3 for its officers and 1 spot for CAC Rep. Don Fortin.

The NIA identified the following King's Court improvements:

- 2 benches to repair
- Add 2 more benches
- Murals beneath the benches
- 2 trash receptacles
- New play structure and matting
- Restriping the basketball courts

According to the City's website, the DREAMS 3 program involves the "annual selection of multiple NIAs to receive between \$1,000 and up to \$50,000 in mini-grant funding. Total of \$200,000 in annual funding available (\$140,000 (GO Bond Funds) + \$60,000 (CDBG Funds)) for small infrastructure improvements, neighborhood beautification and community building grants."

Citizen Advisory Council Report: Don Fortin: Fortin discussed the CAC's May 3, 2023, meeting. He said the Greater Topeka Partnership's Glenda Washington and Nadia Arbelo, Assistant Director America's Small Business Development Corp. (SBDC) Kansas spoke on a social entrepreneurship grant for growing neighborhood projects with \$3,000 in seed money. The CAC would then identify 3 communities to distribute the grants that would involve social, cultural and environment projects.

Fortin said District 8 City Council Member Spencer Duncan spoke on the land bank pilot ordinance he was sponsoring. He said Duncan shared with the CAC how the land bank would benefit NIAs through amassing abandoned properties for future homeownership opportunities and how the land bank's board of trustees, including at least one NIA member, would be charged with directing the land bank.

Fortin said the June 7, 2023 CAC meeting featured a presentation on the Kansas Open Meetings Act (KOMA), a vote on changing the CAC meeting start time to 6 p.m., participating NIAs in the upcoming SORT/DREAMS August 2023 presentation; and 2023 CAC engagement events, including kindergarten roundups/schools, a back-to-school event, the poverty simulation, a Washburn University "Big Event" next year, the Greater Topeka Partnership's involvement in a "Chamber of Commerce for NIAs," the basic income debate (ask if CAC can sponsor this

event and include the CAC as a sponsor.

1208 SW Munson Update: Vice President Pat DeLapp and property owner Antwone McAfee presented. They both said the City likes what's being done at the house and that the "Paint Day" that had been initially set for May 20, 2023, would be moved to July 2023.

Old Business: Private-Public Partnership with Stormont Vail, the City of Topeka and GraceMed Update: This partnership could take on the shape of the one started in Columbus, OH years ago. Here's a link to that initiative: <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/about-us/population-health-and-wellness/healthy-neighborhoods-healthy-families#:~:text=The%20HNHF%20initiative%20targets%20five%20impact%20areas%3A%20affordable,it%20can%20improve%20community%2C%20family%20and%20individual%20wellbeing>. Our NIA met via teleconference with Nationwide Children's Hospital and City of Topeka representatives in 2015 regarding this effort. All parties were supportive of replicating it in Topeka.

This is the "elevator speech" I sent to Stormont-Vail's Amy Kincade and Karla Hedquist for our Apr. 25, 2023, meeting that included Historic Old Town NIA President and CAC Chair ShaMecha King Simms to start our discussions:

Goals:

To bring the three major players together with the City of Topeka to work to holistically improve an adjacent low-to moderate-income neighborhood, Tennessee Town, just as Nationwide Children's Hospital (NCH) in Columbus, OH, worked with the City of Columbus and an adjacent low- to moderate-income neighborhood to improve it through NCH's "Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Families" initiative (<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/about-us/population-health-and-wellness/healthy-neighborhoods-healthy-families>). To continue discussions through the following tentative timetable:

Year One:

Work out through discussions what the immediate priorities will be among a plethora of challenges, including (but not limited to) housing rehabilitation and new construction, infrastructure (streets, alleys, sidewalks, curbs/gutters, lighting), the Central Topeka food desert and food and nutrition insecurity (working with the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis Group, which is involved in the construction of the new Central Topeka grocery store and is a GraceMed partner in that effort), park improvements and creation, crime and safety, the challenges of our senior neighbors, and historic preservation.

Year Two:

Work out through discussions what the specific responses will be for the challenges identified during year one and who the players will be regarding creating opportunities to ameliorate or solve those challenges.

Also, to invite in other Central Topeka neighborhoods, namely the Historic Old Town and Elmhurst neighborhoods, as they both border Stormont Vail and have many of the same challenges as Tennessee Town.

Years Three Through Five:

Implement and assess a multi-point plan created at the end of year two to address challenges.

Partners:

Tennessee Town NIA

Stormont Vail Health

GraceMed Capital Clinic (on board right now with the new grocery store to be built on land it owns and is leasing at SW 12th and Washburn)

Central Topeka Grocery Oasis Group (CTGO)

City of Topeka (city manager and the community engagement, planning and development and public works/utilities departments)

Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library  
Community First, Inc.  
Doorstep, Inc.  
Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc.  
Cornerstone of Topeka, Inc.  
The Five Neighborhood Churches (Asbury-Mt. Olive, Faith Temple, Lane Chapel, Shiloh Baptist, The First Church of the Nazarene)  
Topeka Housing Authority  
Topeka Habitat for Humanity  
Penwell-Gabel Funeral Homes, Crematory and Cemeteries  
ArtsConnect of Topeka

Old Business: Replicating the Hi-Crest NIA's SENT Initiative in Tennessee Town Update: Bell said that because of the leadership change at SENT Topeka, an electronic meeting that had been set would be rescheduled.

SENT Topeka would primarily be a housing partner with the NIA, but also would work with the NIA on other issues.

Old Business: Pedestrian Mid-Block Lighting Update: Bell said he's been searching for programs to fund the lighting project.

Old Business: Lane Garden Update: Bell said he had sent out a request for emails to be sent to the Shawnee county commissioners and the county clerk indicating support for bringing Lane Garden under the county's jurisdiction and rectifying a years-old exclusion of Lane Garden from the city-county parks and recreation consolidation, which put parks and rec under the county.

So far, 18 individuals, including former District One City Council Member Duane Pomeroy, and one NIA (Historic Old Town) have sent support emails to the aforementioned county contacts. If attendees have yet to send a support email, please let Bell know and he'll get the script for the email to them.

Bell also has contacted multiple law firms about a potential civil action against the county. Bell will keep the NIA apprised of what happens.

Bell also said that he was following up on another lead but could not provide any details right now.

Old Business: Central Topeka Grocery Store Update: Central Topeka Grocery Oasis (CTGO) Group Chair Marge Ahrens provided this update:

The Central Topeka Grocery Oasis (<https://www.centraltopekagro.com/>) is scheduled to sign a lease agreement with the GraceMed Health Clinic this week! Next, the group will put together a committee to create a celebration event for our neighbors and friends. If there are Tennessee Town residents who would like to help plan and execute the celebration event, please let Bell know.

Old Business: 12th Street Update: Bell said most recently 12th Street was/is closed at SW Clay in Tennessee Town and at SW Western in the Historic Holliday Park NIA.

Recently the property owner at 1201 SW Lincoln took photos of how the project had taken out her walkway to Lincoln. Bell intervened. His intervention helped make the City come out to replace said walkway. Unfortunately, the City didn't fill in the grassy areas to either side of its work, which were there before the original walkway was taken out. The City has promised to come back out to fill in those grassy areas.

(Note: The City did return to fill in the grassy areas.)

Old Business: Greater Topeka Partnership Poverty Simulation, Spring Public Poverty Simulation Update: The CAC's effort to stage a community-wide poverty simulation has been moved to later this year. The poverty simulation would be staged after a successful Greater Topeka Partnership-only simulation in January.

According to the Missouri Community Action Network (MCAN; <https://www.povertysimulation.net/about/>), “poverty is a reality for many individuals and families. But unless you’ve experienced poverty, it’s difficult to truly understand. The Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) bridges that gap from misconception to understanding. CAPS is an interactive immersion experience. It sensitizes community participants to the realities of poverty.

From MCAN: CAPS is not a game. It is based on real Community Action clients and their lives. CAPS exists to:

**Promote Poverty Awareness:** During the simulation, role-play a month in poverty and experience low-income families’ lives.

**Increase Understanding:** After the simulation, you will unpack your learning and brainstorm community change.

**Inspire Local Change:** Together, you can be a voice to end poverty in your family, friends and community.

**Transform Perspectives:** The goal of CAPS is to shift the paradigm about poverty away from being seen as a personal failure and toward the understanding of poverty as structural, a failure of society.

And, most importantly, the poverty simulation is an opportunity for Topeka to identify and address those structural challenges so that we’re moving forward on lessening poverty in our neck of the woods. A poverty simulation can set the stage and provide the soundtrack for all of the other work Topeka’s LMI advocates do.

Old Business: International Academy Update: Sandy Lassiter: Lassiter said things were going well and that the children would be out of school soon. She also said that pickleball with pizza had started.

Kudos: To All of Our Graduate Students, Well Done!: Bell congratulated all of the 2023 graduates, from K-12, trade/technical/business schools and colleges/universities.

Announcements: Community Engagement Programs; Computers for Seniors, Lawn Mowing Services, TOTO first-time homebuyers’ assistance program. Next Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Mon., July 10, 2023, Buchanan Ctr., 1195 SW Buchanan.

Adjournment:

*Lassiter moved adjournment. Fortin seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

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Treasurer's Reports for July 10, 2023 General Membership Meeting:

<b>Tennessee Town NIA 2023 Operations and Communications Budget:</b>				
Date	Piece Count	Transaction Type	Withdrawal	Balance
1-1-23	▶	▶	▶	<b>\$983.02 (same since 2021)</b>
5-13-23	1	KS Rentals: Microphone/ Speaker Rental for Brown Event	\$63.03	<b>\$919.99</b>
6-1-23	1	KS State Nonprofit Fee	\$40.00	<b>\$879.99</b>
<b>TOTALS:</b>	▶	▶	<b>\$106.62</b>	<b>\$879.99</b>

Once again, Bell said that community engagement had been unable to provide figures for the meeting notice card copying and mailing expenses, so those expenses cannot be included in this report.

Envista Free-Will Donation Report for July 10, 2023 General Membership Meeting:

<b>Tennessee Town NIA 2016-2023 Envista Account:</b>			
Date	Transaction Type	Deposit/Withdrawal	Balance
1-1-23 through 3-31-23	Statement	-----	\$144.72
1-1-23 through 3-31-23	Statement	\$20 deposit on Mar. 15, 2023	\$164.72
4-1-23 through 6-30-23	Statement	\$0.00	\$164.72
<b>TOTALS:</b>	▶	▶	<b>\$164.72</b>

Note: A withdrawal has never been made from this account.

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Reports for July 10, 2023 General Membership Meeting:

DREAMS 3 Application: King's Court Complex Improvements Update:

Bell (via Zoom), Lassiter and Fortin attended the DREAMS 3 Workshop, held at 6 p.m. on Tue., July 27, 2023 at the Holliday Building.

According to the City's website, the DREAMS 3 program involves the "annual selection of multiple NIAs to receive between \$1,000 and up to \$50,000 in mini-grant funding. Total of \$200,000 in annual funding available (\$140,000 (GO Bond Funds) + \$60,000 (CDBG Funds)) for small infrastructure improvements, neighborhood beautification and community building grants." NIAs may also partner with Interested community partners to apply for grant funding through this program.

The following topics were discussed:

Eligible Activities:

**PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS** • Sidewalks & ADA Ramps (no brick)\* • Curb repair/replacement (no brick or stone resetting) • Alley approaches • Pedestrian signals and Crosswalks\* • Traffic Calming/Safety Measures • Tree Planting • Lighting/Solar Lighting [Right-of-Way only (**see below**)/no midblock lighting in residential areas)

**PUBLIC UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS** • Paint Storm Structure Lids, Hydrants (painting/cleaning) • Install Driveway Culverts & Drainage Ditch Maintenance • Small Stormwater Development Control Plan (DCP) or Best Management Practice (BMP) Initiatives for controlling flooding, reducing erosion • Replace Fire Hydrants

**NEIGHBORHOOD BEAUTIFICATION & QUALITY OF LIFE PROJECTS (Note: This is where the King's Court Complex fits in)** • Public Park Amenities /Playgrounds\* • Public Community/Recreation/School structures/grounds improvements\* • Public Bus Shelters/Benches\* • Murals/Banners/Place making monuments OR signs

**COMMUNITY BUILDING & ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS** • Public Programs - Community Education classes/programs (various topics) • Public Events – ex. - Neighborhood Block Parties/Festivals/Holiday Happenings, Neighborhood Resource or Health Fair, Community or Family Event Partnerships (Schools, Churches, other local entity) • Sports Tournaments/Training Events • Talent Shows/Concerts • Game Nights/Tournaments • Neighborhood Clean-up • Financial Literacy / Homeownership / Repair classes

This is what the NIA has previously proposed to be included in our DREAMS 3 application:

- 2 benches to repair
- Add 2 more benches
- Murals beneath the benches
- 2 trash receptacles
- New play structure and matting
- Restriping the basketball courts



Requests have been made recently to add the following items:

- 2 new basketball goals
- Headstone-style sign denoting Tennessee Town and King's Court histories
- 4 new trash receptacles total
- The bricks in front of the Black History Museum/Colored Women's Club to be cleaned or replaced to create a "Walk Of Memory" specifically for Tennessee Town families and other African-American families who shaped Topeka's history. (Note: The NIA can expand its application to include the museum and King's Court together as part of a larger, multigenerational living heritage complex.)
- Solar-powered basketball court lighting at King's Court (request probably will be denied because of "right-of-way" language contained above; the NIA should ask anyway).

We need a motion to include those things as part of our application:

**MOTION: I move that the Tennessee Town NIA include the following items in its 2023 DREAMS 3 application:**

- **2 benches to repair**
- **Add 2 more benches**
- **Murals beneath all the benches**
- **4 trash receptacles**
- **New play structure and matting**
- **Restriping the basketball courts**
- **2 new basketball goals**
- **Headstone-style sign denoting Tennessee Town and King's Court histories**
- **The bricks in front of the Black History Museum/Colored Women's Club to be cleaned or replaced to create a "Walk Of Memory" specifically for Tennessee Town families and other African-American families who shaped Topeka's history.**
- **Solar-powered basketball court lighting at King's Court (request probably will be denied because of "right-of-way" language contained above; the NIA should ask anyway).**

Private-Public Partnership with Stormont Vail, the City of Topeka and GraceMed Update:

Stormont-Vail's Amy Kincade and Karla Hedquist met electronically with Bell and Historic Old Town NIA and CAC Chair ShaMecha King Simms on Apr. 25, 2023. The report of that meeting is included in the May 8, 2023, NIA meeting packet.

The following discussions have occurred since that meeting:

On Tuesday, June 13, 2023 at 02:59:16 PM CDT, Hedquist, Karla <khedquis@stormontvail.org> wrote:

Hello!

After our meeting with you, Amy and (I on Apr. 25), I also met with ShaMecha to discuss the role of the Citizens Advisory Council and how we might engage at a broader level. ShaMecha asked for some time to reflect on our conversation and think about potential opportunities. Thank you for connecting us.

Karla Hedquist  
Director, Community Health Engagement

On Wednesday, June 14, 2023 at 12:39:14 PM CDT, Michael Bell <theanticj@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hey!

I spoke with ShaMech. She said that her taking time to reflect shouldn't stop us from moving forward right now.

The 1st partnership I'd like to discuss taps into Stormont Vail's strength, a health clinic for low-income Topekans held in early September. We could stage it at Stormont Vail or one of the Cotton O'Neil sites and indicate that it's a partnership with SV and the TTNIA. As a number of our residents are children (returning to school in September) and seniors, some with no or inadequate health insurance, a health clinic would be a great 1st collaboration. As a senior with health challenges, this collaboration resonates for me and will resonate with others like me. If the CAC and other neighborhoods want to sign on as supporting partners, then that would be fine.

Mike Bell

On Friday, June 30, 2023 at 01:57:06 PM CDT, Hedquist, Karla <khedquis@stormontvail.org> wrote:

Hi Michael,

We appreciate your bringing the additional needs of Tennessee Town to our attention. As we discussed, we receive multiple neighborhood level requests and are hoping to engage at a broader Community Advisory Council level on issues that affect our healthcare delivery region.

As we review data and uncover areas of community-wide need, we are embarking on an initiative that might be of mutual interest. We are developing strategies to improve maternal and infant health outcomes for Black mothers and babies. Has this been a topic of concern your neighborhood has brought to the Citizens Advisory Council?

Thank you,

Karla Hedquist  
Director, Community Health Engagement

Fri, Jun 30 at 5:01 PM

Hi, Karla (and all)!

Hope all is going well. When we reached out to you with a health clinic being our first partnership activity, we had in mind blood pressure checks and more basic health maintenance activities across the entire spectrum of our residents, specifically children (returning to school in September) and seniors, some with no or inadequate health insurance, a health clinic would be a great first collaboration. As a senior with health challenges, this collaboration resonates for me and will resonate with others like me. We thought a health clinic would play into a Stormont Vail strength and serve our residents.

It should be noted that a health clinic is an activity that could be expanded across NIA borders and potentially include the CAC.

Regarding an initiative that would develop strategies to improve maternal and infant health outcomes for Black mothers and babies, that has not been a topic of concern in Tennessee Town. Perhaps that is a topic that should be addressed throughout the community, but I'm not sure that NIAs or the CAC (in which I serve as an at-large member) are the proper venues as we have to serve everybody who is and neighborhoods that are lower-income.

Given the topic that you've identified, I do have the following questions:

- Why did Stormont Vail identify maternal and infant health outcomes for Black mothers and babies as a priority?
- Was there any outreach done in the community at large or within the Black community that identified this issue as a priority or did it come from within the Stormont Vail hierarchy?
- Given the myriad health issues that impact Black Topekans (uninsured/inadequate health coverage, food/nutrition insecurity, being forced to buy processed foods because fresh fruits and vegetables cost too much, the various stresses scientifically linked to being Black in America, and other issues), how was this topic identified as a priority?

We'd really like to continue discussions on the health clinic.

Thanks!

Michael Bell  
Tennessee Town NIA President

#### Lane Garden Update:

Bell is still working on the lead he mentioned at the May 8, 2023, NIA meeting and will keep the membership posted as to how it works out.

#### Central Topeka Grocery Store Update:

This is the update provided by Central Topeka Grocery Oasis Chair Marge Ahrens:

- We have met with our architect. He is getting bids on a geological study of the grocery store site in order to determine the depth of bedrock and begin planning for geothermal energy sources. The study is expected to cost between \$5000 to \$7000.
- We are considering hiring a fundraiser/administrator who would be paid from financial gifts she/he raise for construction of the store.
- We are looking for a grocer who can meet our standards for a community grocer:
  1. The store is to be designed to serve the needs of culturally diverse low/moderate persons in Central Topeka neighborhoods for access to affordable healthy foods: fresh fruits, vegetables and meats. It will also make fresh groceries available to employees of nearby businesses, hospitals, churches, schools, Washburn University and workers in transit.
  2. Market research shows the store size is to between 10,000-14,000 square feet.
  3. The store will accept SNAP and WIC.
  4. The store will require an experienced grocer in order to succeed. This factor does not preclude entrepreneurial involvement.
  5. The store will offer community engagement. It will provide opportunities for purchasing money orders, for check cashing, and for making utility payments and securing postal services.
  6. The store will be built with grants/donations and local bonds. These offer the lowest upfront cost for a grocer, potential for a low lease fee, and freedom from debt-- all savings which can be passed on to shoppers.
  7. With the availability of solar or wind as a source of electricity, the use of energy saving equipment, and practices that conserve packaging and use fruits and vegetables in the preparation of meals for sale, the store has the best opportunity to sustain itself for the community.
  8. The store should be aesthetically pleasing and designed for safety, security and flexibility in a post-COVID world. It will require proper lighting, an attractive, clean environment and the use of security staff.
  9. The store must be easily accessible and will provide options for carry out, pick up and delivery.

10. The store will provide training and a living wage to the manager and employees.
11. The store will be a catalyst in the resurgence of community and dignity for our neighbors.
12. The store can provide a blueprint for other Topeka areas where low income and poor access to healthy foods (food deserts) dominate the character and health inequities of neighborhoods.

Topeka Poverty Simulation Update:

Planning continues for the city-wide poverty simulation, now scheduled to be held from 1-4 p.m. on Thu., Oct. 26, 2023, at a venue to be determined. Community Engagement (CE) Director Monique Glaude, Senior CE Coordinator Bianca Burnett; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer Ernestor de la Rosa (liaison to Interim City Manager Richard Nienstedt); Historic Old Town NIA President and Citizen Advisory Council Chair ShaMecha King Simms and Bell are serving as the poverty simulation steering committee.

The poverty simulation experience is offered to provide participants an opportunity to reflect on how their professional roles impact the lives of low-income citizens. Our goal is that participants will not only exit the simulation with greater empathy, but with a commitment to reimagine their services and solidarity to low-income citizens.

Bell is conducting a search for a nationally renowned speaker and poverty activist to address Topeka the evening of the poverty simulation.

Pedestrian Mid-Block Lighting Update:

Bell said discussions continue as possible funding mechanisms are being identified for federal fiscal year 2024.

President Bell’s “Bottom-Up” Planning Proposal (as seen in the Topeka Capital-Journal):

In a June 27, 2023, Topeka Capital-Journal article that resulted from an email Bell sent to more than 80 Topekans, including our elected and appointed officials, he outlined and discussed his plan for transforming the way local government works with the people its supposed to represent. This is the article:

**Convinced Topeka ignored input on a street plan, Michael Bell wants to re-think government**

Tim Hrenchir The Topeka Capital-Journal  
Published 6:12 a.m. CT June 27, 2023

Abraham Lincoln ended his Gettysburg Address by resolving that "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth."

Michael Bell sent an email last month to more than 80 people, including the Topeka City Council, outlining steps he suggests be taken in Topeka to more effectively mirror the ideals Lincoln championed at Gettysburg.

Bell questions the process Topeka's city government followed in carrying out its soon-to-be-finished project that includes reducing S.W. 12th Street from two lanes of traffic to one between S.W. Gage and Topeka boulevards.

Bell, who is president of the Tennessee Town Neighborhood Improvement Association, thinks the city in planning that project didn't seek public input until after its staff had already decided what the city was going to do.

**'Everyday people at the top of government's pyramid'**

Bell's proposed plan suggests the city of Topeka and Shawnee County team up to implement the "bottom-up" process of planning put forth by Strong Towns, a movement aimed at giving people better local government.

Bell's document is titled "The Revolution of 'Bottom-Up' Planning, or How Government Should Have Been Operating the Whole Darn Time."

The bottom-up planning process prioritizes putting "everyday people at the top of government's pyramid," he said.

Bell, who has been involved in local government at the grassroots level for 27 years, said he hopes to inspire conversations that genuinely and positively transform city and county government in this community.

"I think there's an opportunity here for us to at least start to discuss the broad outlines of where we can go with this, because I think it's the best way for the city to operate," he said.

### **Topeka government has historically resisted change, Bell says**

But Bell said no city council members have responded to his email, and he isn't optimistic about seeing his suggestions put in place.

The challenge, he said, is that Topeka's city government — for the most part — has historically resisted change, particularly transformational change.

Topeka city officials have sought to maintain the status quo, even if that's not good for the public, Bell said.

### **NIA president: City has already taken step toward 'bottom-up' planning**

Bell was accompanied to an interview Friday with The Capital-Journal by two people who support his proposed plan.

They were longtime Topekan Zach Scott and ShaMecha King Simms, president of the Historic Old Town NIA and chairwoman of the Citizens Advisory Council.

King Simms agreed with Bell that Topeka's city government has shown a lack of imagination in terms of thinking outside the box on neighborhood issues.

Still, she said, a lot of great people work for Topeka's city government.

And that government has already started moving in the direction Bell proposes by holding outcome-based budgeting meetings last year aimed at giving everyday citizens more of a voice in budgeting, King Simms said.

Those meetings were well-attended and brought together an impressive cross-section of people who did a good job of pinpointing matters that are important to Topekans, King Simms and Bell said.

### **Process would start with public comment**

Bell's proposed plan calls for Topeka's city government between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31 of each year to reach out to the public seeking to accomplish two key priorities.

One involves receiving input regarding the missions of the departments that provide services to the public. Those include Shawnee County's parks and recreation department and the city's departments and divisions of utilities, public works, planning and development, housing services and community engagement, Bell said.

He said the other priority would involve getting answers from residents, either electronically or by phone, to a series of relevant, open-ended questions.

Bell said the main question would be, "What are the challenges you see regarding specific departments and what opportunities do you see to address those challenges?"

## **Public meetings would follow**

City staff members between Jan. 1 and 31 of each year would tabulate the responses, which would be made public on Feb. 1.

Officials each February would hold four public "listening sessions."

Residents at those sessions would talk about what they think should be done about the challenges they identified. They would also reinforce any previously expressed thoughts and account for any circumstances that may have changed since they initially submitted input, Bell said.

He suggests one session be held during each week of February, with the sessions taking place in four different parts of the city to enable equal access by residents.

Local government departments each March would then compile a report about their activities over the previous year, focusing on "where we've been," "where we're at" and "where we're headed," Bell said.

"The key word here is 'we,' which fulfills the new paradigm's focus on bottom-up planning," he said.

## **'Is this radical? I don't think so.'**

Bell's plan proposes calls for Topeka's governing body and the Shawnee County Commission between April and December of each year to work with residents to design, implement and assess policies and programming reflecting the input they've received.

That information would be taken into account as they consider county parks and recreation programming and funding, as well as the city's Capital Improvement Budget and Capital Improvement Plan.

"Is this radical?" Bell said of his plan. "I don't think so. Is this different from the way local governments usually operate? You bet it is. That's the point."

## **Topeka city councilwoman weighs in**

Topeka City Councilwoman Christina Valdivia-Alcala spoke positively of Bell's ideas in an email Friday.

"I like the layout Bell gives," she wrote. "Makes sense, involves all, keeps transparency at the forefront."

Valdivia-Alcala indicated she considers Bell's proposed plan to be "a challenge to individuals and neighborhoods to get involved" at a time when considerable apathy exists here.

"This new model as Bell proposes, I believe, IS possible in Topeka," Valdivia-Alcala wrote.

The key question, she added, is "whether Topeka local government and individual residents are ready to change their mindsets, roll up their sleeves and get in it together."

*Contact Tim Hrenchir at [threnchir@gannett.com](mailto:threnchir@gannett.com) or 785-213-5934.*

**Bell is asking the NIA at this meeting to vote in favor of asking the City of Topeka to sit down with neighborhood activists and others to start discussions on adopting this new process for our city.**

**Fighting the Onslaught Of Dollar Stores (FOODS) Efforts to Change the Vote for a Dollar Tree at 1404 SW 17th, City Support for Grocery Store Retention/Development:**

The grassroots group, "Fighting the Onslaught Of Dollar Stores," has been organized to make the City of Topeka address the lack of notification of many of the surrounding neighborhoods regarding the zoning change it approved to enable the creation of a Dollar Tree store at 1404 SW 17th and to ask the City of Topeka to focus its attentions on the issues of food deserts and food/nutrition insecurity by supporting existing or establishing new full-service

grocery stores with healthier food options and supporting real economic growth and job creation in low-income areas, as well as communities of color, areas where local disinvestment still is prevalent.

Regarding the lack of notification of the zoning change at 1404 SW 17th, FOODS asked the following of Topeka's city attorney:

It has been brought to FOODS' attention by the City's Planning and Development Department Senior Land Use Planner Michael Hall that the notification process regarding Washburn Ave KS LLC (Z23/08), which provides "for certain changes in zoning on property located at 1404 SW 17th Street on Lots 228, 230, 232, 234, 236, & 238 of the Byron Place Subdivision FROM "C-2" Commercial District TO "X-1" Mixed Use District," was not completed per guidelines as a number of nearby neighborhoods were not notified of the zoning change and other issues involved (including two of the three neighborhoods, College Hill and Chesney Park, directly adjacent to the property in question) and all of the affected city council members (District 6 City Council Member Hannah Naeger) were not notified of the zoning change request or the public hearing that followed.

Additionally, regarding the proliferation of dollar stores, just in Central Topeka there already is a Dollar General near SW 10th and College (1920 SW 10th), a Family Dollar in the old Sutton's building off of SW 21st and Washburn (1313 SW 21st) and a Dollar Tree near SW 6th and Macvicar (2630 SW 6th), as well as the Dollar General that's Central Topeka-adjacent, at 1401 SW Gage Blvd. FOODS is concerned about the proliferation of these stores as they tend to discourage the existence and creation of legitimate, full-service grocery stores as well as charging poor people more money for largely processed foods.

Seven Central Topeka neighborhood leaders who were not notified of the proposed zoning change or the hearing in advance of the May 9, 2023, governing body vote to approve the requested zoning changes at 1404 SW 17th joined together with a well-respected Topeka activist to become FOODS and request that Topeka's governing body:

- Vote to reconsider its May 9, 2023 vote and remand the aforementioned zoning request back to the City's planning and development (P&D) department.
- Direct P&D to implement a new notification process that matches its administrative procedures by providing full notification of all affected neighborhood organizations and city council members.
- Direct P&D to draft an ordinance reflecting what it does administratively regarding notification and a hearing and then present the ordinance proposal to the city's governing body for approval.
- Institute an immediate moratorium on new applications for enterprises connected to "dollar" retail shops to create an ordinance (emphasis on a dispersal ordinance and/or conditional use regulations) that more appropriately responds to the community needs regarding the proliferation and concentration of dollar stores in or near low-income neighborhoods.
- Ask the city's governing body to at least pass a resolution formally prioritizing the maintaining of existing and the creation of new grocery stores to address food deserts and food/nutrition insecurity as a better option for healthy foods and economic development.

**Bell is asking the NIA at this meeting to vote in favor of the above requests that FOODS is asking of the City of Topeka to (1) restart the zoning process at 1404 SW 17th and to codify P&D administrative guidelines regarding neighborhood and city council member notification/hearings, (2) to control the proliferation and concentration of dollar stores throughout Topeka and (3) to endorse prioritizing grocery store retention and creation.**